

A Night at the Old Worthen

It took me a few minutes to set up and I got to do two songs: one jazz funk, and one jazz fusion. The guitarist and bassist On Tuesday night in Lowell, Massachusetts, there is a jazz jam at the Old Worthen. It's run by the guitarist, and there are a drummer and a bass player who round out the combo. Other musicians from Lowell come down and play along with the combo or sit in for somebody in the combo. I knew it would be unusual for me to participate in the Tuesday jazz jam, as I do original jazz songs, and the combo usually do jazz standards and rarely play a form of jazz called free jazz. They usually don't do much fusion, but the jazz players in Lowell get to play, and everybody usually has a good time. But the willingness of the combo to accept other levels of jazz performance is limited. I'm a one-man-band. My latest Korg keyboard musical workstation is called the Karma. It has an advanced type of auto-accompaniment, which makes playing as a one-man-band, after studying music for over twenty-five years, effortless.

When I came down to play that Tuesday night, I didn't know if I would be playing, but I brought my equipment anyways. I walked in with my power amp. I had my keyboard and keyboard stand in the trunk of my car. I came in as the band was setting up their equipment, and told them of my interest in playing. When they heard the term auto-accompaniment, their enthusiasm lessened greatly. I asked if I could play between sets, so they could see what I basically do. Just because the drums and bass and other accompaniment was included, and would exclude the drummer and bass player from participating with my self-styled musical improvisations, using jazz stylings far advanced from what any band could do on their own. They were correct in feeling it wasn't proper for a person playing an instrument with auto-accompaniment, as it is a jazz jam, and idea is for jazz musicians to jam together. I understood this, and I wasn't bummed out. I'd check out the jazz anyways. And as long as I was going to be there all night, I'd thought a take a few notes on the evening. These are the facts and only the facts:

It's so dark in here, I can hardly see to write. I'm at the jazz jam. I've heard about it, and came down to check it out once before a few weeks ago. It's said that Edgar Allen Poe slept upstairs at the Old Worthen. I think it's true. This should be a good place to write.

I've been looking for a place to play in Lowell with my new Korg Karma keyboard workstation. The workstation has built-in drums and base accompaniment. It's the most incredible keyboard.

Unfortunately at the jazz jam on Tuesday it's about different musicians sitting in with the band. It's a drummer, bassist, and guitar player, who is the person who runs it and is the head honcho.

When I heard about the jam, I thought a good friend Mark Welcome was organizing it at one time.

Doug, a drummer, just came by and said the band is going to let me play.

When I came in they were kind of put off because my workstation does not require a drummer or a bassist.

The band jazz started. They don't play many originals or free jazz. Free jazz is where everybody does their own thing and blend in together. The band sounds great. The drummer is hot. The bassist is cooking and the guitarist is doing his thing. They're playing some jazz standard.

Mark is here. It's a kick being here. The last time I was here, I was goofing with Mark and Doug about starting a jazz revolution in Lowell. Because Jack Kerouac came from Lowell and was into jazz, people who are into him enjoy jazz. But jazz is dead in Lowell. This night there are more customers who hang at the bar than people listening to the jazz. I'm sure they enjoy it and come here to hang out. I'm sorry it's starting to shift, there are more people here to hear the band.

The first set the band plays. Before the next set, musicians get together to work on what they are going to do the next set.

Mark and Doug played the last time I was here. They are both good players. I think I've known them about twenty years. It was great hanging with them last time.

Jazz is not dead in Lowell after all. I just went out with Doug to have some brain oil. He had some and asked me to go.

It's like old times.

Look, more college students are here now to check out the jazz. It's October 2nd - school has been back in for over a month now. Maybe some are musicians, students at the college.

Last time a guitar player named Greg came down and played later in the evening. It was great to see him again. He went to the college Lowell U years ago when I met him and ended up staying around the area.

Maybe I'll get to meet some musicians in the audience that want to jam. I bet there are some hot players around.

Going to the college, taking music courses.

The band just took a break.

I started playing at the only other place in Lowell to play at called the Sugar Shack. They have an open mike. Everybody gets to play. It's

mostly acoustic guitar doing folk kind of stuff, some rock, and mostly original tunes. It's mostly young music student from the college there.

It was a real trip playing there at first. I felt kind of out of place. I'm freaking 46 years old, and everyone else was in their twenties.

The first time I played there my good friend Anna came. I've known her for over a year. I met her last year during the summer production put on by the acting studio. She's my biggest fan and closest confidante. I wasn't sure she would be able to come and see me, but it was a joy when she showed up.

I did well when I played. It seemed that everyone enjoyed it.

I'm glad Anna got to hear me play. She has heard so much of my music, especially the new stuff with the Korg Karma.

The band just started the second set.

The young guys sitting next to me left – a few young women just moved up front to take their seats. I wish more women like them would show up at the Sugar Shack. It would be nice to play and meet some young intelligent college women for some companionship.

I miss my friend Anna. She would love this scene tonight at the jazz jam, and she would surely make me appear more desirable to the other women.

I'm on my second Baily's and coke chaser. I'm starting to feel relaxed, and I'm starting to rock to the beat. Time for another drink soon – I normally don't have more than three.

A good friend and great jazz guitar player just stopped by, Arthur, a world-renowned cab driver, and paid me the forty dollars he owed me for some tires I sold him.

I brought twenty dollars. Now I've got enough for another Baily's. I've got four cigarettes left. Got to try to make it last until 12:30 or 1:00 when the music stops. I bet these babes next to me would enjoy a guy like me. They look like the type.

Time for another Baily's before I go out and have the little bit of brain oil that I have in my car.

There are a lot of musicians waiting to play. I don't think I'll have an opportunity to play tonight. Might as well get a buzz.

I haven't gone out and had three Baily's in years. I just got my last Baily's. I always give a buck tip, especially when it's a woman bartender. I just got my last coke, this time no ice.

After listening to the college girls jabber, I'm more aware how hip Anna is, for being around the same age. They're really very nice looking kind of girls, but there is no one in the world like Anna.

A new line-up just came up to add to the mix. I'm thinking what Anna would say now if she knew I had three Baily's. We've been wanting to

get together for a drink for quite a while now. She would love how loose I'm getting and all. They are playing a funky beat. I feel like dancing. They stop the song and the beat. They're starting another funk beat. Good. It reminds me of one thing I'll like to do is dance with Anna. She says she doesn't dance. I feel like asking one of the co-eds to dance.

No one is dancing. No one ever does. Someone should start.

It's about midnight. The young bucks, obviously not musicians, are acting rowdy. My last drink and coke almost got spilled. They jam on one song for almost fifteen minutes. Sometimes like this song they're playing now.

Being around Anna had made me weak for younger women. Wish I could dance. I just keep looking around for a dance partner. In a place where no dances, the opportunities are few. All the co-eds are leaving. Maybe I see some more next time.

The place is getting deserted. Maybe I'll get to play after all. Maybe not. The guitarist that runs it hasn't approached me, and Mark and Doug still haven't played. I've got one cigarette left, and maybe three more swigs of coke. I may be making an exit soon.

I just went outside to see if Mark was going to play. I don't want to leave my talbe and drink to go outside to ask the guitarist what is up - am I going to get to play tonight.

There are less people now than at the beginning of the night.

12:30 the band has stopped for fifteen minutes. Maybe I can smoke half a cigarette at a time. Make it last. Mark says he's going to play. I think Mark is bummed he didn't get to play before everyone left.

Mark had brought and set-up his own amplifier earlier in the evening for him to use, hoping to play early. The first set the band played by themselves. The second set they had a bass player stand in and use Mark's amp. The third set another bass player stood in and used Mark's equipment. Which was okay with Mark, but he had hoped to play earlier in the night, as usually happens, as he's a regular playing there. It was the last set. The crowd had left, and now Mark was asked to play.

Mark just bought me a coke. I'm staying now. Maybe I can get a cigarette from him too before he goes on.

Got to take a squirt - that's my third.

Looks like I'm going to get to play after all. Mark was asked to play after everyone was gone, and he said, "How about Lenny?" (that's me) to the guitarist that runs the gig. Mark let me play instead of him. What a guy, and he gave me three cigarettes too.

came up during the fusion song and the guitarist said, "We're going to play some *jazz* now." Sometimes musicians are over-trained in what they play and in what little style of music they embrace.

Oh it would have been nicer if Doug didn't play bass during the first song and part of the second song. A drummer who played earlier in the evening came up and said he enjoyed what I did. That was vindication.

I put my keyboard in my car and I got to thank Mark. Better keep an eye on my car while I'm inside.

I forgot to tell you about upstairs. They have a rec room upstairs where younger people hang out. They play rap, industrial, hardcore, and other current popular styles. There is a small bumper pool table and a ping pong table. The music is loud, sometimes louder than the jazz playing downstairs if they forget to close the door of the room.

Well, it looks like jazz isn't dead in Lowell after all. It's just dying of old age.

Postscript

The next night I played at my usual spot, the Sugar Shack. I performed two jazz instrumentals, which everyone applauded for and enjoyed, a classic piece, which was very well received, and lastly a rock Emerson, Lake, and Palmer -ish instrumental improv that went over great. Looks like I got a chance to play after all. Somebody's got to keep jazz and original creative music alive in Lowell. It might as well be me.

